

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05

SAB-01 SP-02 /034 W

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R 072220" OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8147

S E C R E T MANAGUA 3896

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, NU

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT SOMOZA'S VIEWS ON PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT
OMAR TORRIJOS

1. IN A SERIES OF CONVERSATIONS DURING THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS
PRESIDENT

SOMOZA HAS EXPRESSED HIS VIEWS ON THE LEADERS OF NEIGHBORING
COUNTRIES. THE COMPOSITE PORTRAIT OF PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT OMAR
TORRIJOS THAT HAS EMERGED FROM THESE DISCUSSIONS MAY BE OF SOME
INTEREST BECAUSE IT IS BASED ON RELATIVELY FREQUENT PERSONAL
CONTACT AND DEALINGS WITH PRESIDENT TORRIJOS OVER A PROLONGED
PERIOD OF TIME.

2. PRESIDENT SOMOZA TOLD ME THAT TORRIJOS IS A MAN OF NO FIXED
IDEOLOGY WHO HAS SEIZED ON THE NATION OF NON-ALIGNMENT AS A MEANS
OF REDUCING U.S. INFLUENCE IN PANAMA AND GAINING BARGAINING
LEVERAGE WITH THE UNITED STATES. HIS EXCESSIVE AMBITION LEADS
HIM TO TAKE ON MORE TASKS THAT HE CAN HANDLE EFFECTIVELY. HE IS
SOMETIMES VERY AUDACIOUS AND INDISCREET BECAUSE OF HIS LACK OF SELF-
RESTRAINT. AS THE PRESIDENT PUT IT "HE IS LIKE A BOXER THROWING
WILD PUNCHES ALL OVER THE PLACE".

3. HE HAS SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE UNRELIABLE AND UNSCRUPULOUS ON
MANY OCCASIONS. PRESIDENT SOMOZA MENTIONED TORRIJOS'
PARTICIPATION IN OPEB AS AN EXAMPLE. TORRIJOS ARGUED STRONGLY
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IN FAVOR OF A BANAMA TAX BY ALL BANANA PRODUCING COUNTRIES IN THE AREA, THEN ALLEGEDLY TURNED AROUND AND FAILED TO COLLECT THE TAX FROM THE BANANA COMPANY. THE FUNDS WERE HELD IN ESCROW BY THE COMPANY. TORRIJOS SIMPLY DECIDED NOT TO LIVE UP TO THE AGREEMENT WITH THE OTHER BANANA PRODUCING COUNTRIES. MOREOVER, THE PRESIDENT TOLD ME THAT HE HAS TRIED TO DO BUSINESS WITH TORRIJOS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS IN RECENT YEARS BUT THAT HE CAN'T BE TRUSTED TO KEEP HIS PART OF THE BARGAIN. HE CITED THE BILATERAL TRADE AGREEMENT BETWEEN PANAMA AND NICARAGUA. WHENEVER IT DIDN'T SUIT TORRIJOS, HE SIMPLY REFUSED TO HONOR THE AGREEMENT. PRESIDENT SOMOZA COMPLAINED THAT TORRIJOS HAS SHOWN THAT HE IS NOT 'GRATEFUL FOR FAVORS RECEIVED. FURTHERMORE, SOMOZA DISTRUSTED TORRIJOS' JUDGMENT AND SAID THAT TORRIJOS SUPPORTED HALF-BAKED IDEAS SUCH AS OPEB BECAUSE HE DOES NOT ANALYZE SITUATIONS CAREFULLY AND OBJECTIVELY.

4. PRESIDENT SOMOZA SAID THAT TORRIJOS HAD BOXED HIMSELF INTO A CORNER ON THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. HE IS BEING PURSUED BY THE RADICAL STUDENTS AND OTHERS TO USE VIOLENT CONFRONTATION TACTICS AGAINST THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION KNOWING FULL WELL THAT THE U.S. CONGRESS IS NOT GOING TO ACT ON ANY NEW TREATY UNTIL AFTER THE 1976 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT THIS HAS CREATED A VERY VOLATILE AND DANGEROUS SITUATION.

5. THE PRESIDENT BELIEVES THAT TORRIJOS NOW CONSIDERS NICARAGUA AS AN ENEMY. HE HAD BEEN INFORMED RECENTLY THAT TORRIJOS HAS DECLARED THAT HIS POLITICAL ACTIONS ARE INSPIRED BY MARX AND SANDINO. THE PRESIDENT INTERPRETED THAT TO MEAN THAT TORRIJOS WAS CONSIDERING THE ANTI-CAPITALIST PATH TO DEVELOPMENT AND VIOLENT ANTI-IMPERIALISM AS THE ROUTE TO NATIONAL LIBERATION. HE FEARED THAT TORRIJOS WAS, CONSCIOUSLY OR UNCONSCIOUSLY, PREPARING THE CLIMATE IN PANAMA FOR A VIOLENT CONFRONTATION WITH THE UNITED STATES. HE BELIEVED THAT THE RECENT STONING OF THE U.S. EMBASSY IN PANAMA WAS DONE WITH THE TACIT APPROVAL OF TORRIJOS BECAUSE IN A COUNTRY AS SMALL AS PANAMA, TORRIJOS MUST HAVE KNOWN ABOUT IT BEFOREHAND.

6. HE FRANKLY ADMITTED THAT HIS PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH TORRIJOS HAD DETERIORATED IN RECENT YEARS, THAT HE DISAGREED WITH TORRIJOS' PRESSURE TACTICS IN DEALING WITH THE UNITED STATES, AND THAT HE DISLIKED HAVING THE CUBANS PRESENT NEARBY IN
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PANAMA. HE SAID THAT HE HAD GRADUALLY AND REGRETFULLY ARRIVED AT THE CONCLUSION THAT TORRIJOS IS AN UNRELIABLE, UNSCRUPULOUS AND UNSTABLE POLITICAL LEADER. HIS INITIAL IMPRESSION OF TORRIJOS AFTER HE HAD SEIZED POWER WAS THAT HE WOULD TURN OUT TO BE A SOLID AND STABLE LEADER. THIS JUDGMENT HAD BEEN DISPROVEN BY EXPERIENCE AND EVENTS.

7. THROUGHOUT OUR CONVERSATIONS THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS WERE PUNCTUATED WITH ANECDOTES AND EXAMPLES OF HIS PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH TORRIJOS THAT TENDED TO CONFIRM THE VIEWPOINTS SUMMARIZED ABOVE. PRESIDENT SOMOZA STRIKES ME AS BEING A GENERALLY SHREWD, ACCURATE OBSERVER OF MEN AND EVENTS. NEVERTHELESS, HIS ANALYSIS OF TORRIJOS' CHARACTER PROBABLY HAS BEEN COLORED TO SOME EXTENT BY THE UNHAPPY RECENT TURN IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT.
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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** LIMDIS
*** Current Classification *** SECRET

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PERSONAL OPINION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 OCT 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975MANAGU03896
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: n/a
Film Number: D750348-0746
From: MANAGUA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751098/aaaagulv.tel
Line Count: 129
Locator: TEXT ON MICROFILM, TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 11 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <11 SEP 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <06 NOV 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> srp 971015
Subject: PRESIDENT SOMOZA'S VIEWS ON PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT OMAR TORRIJOS
TAGS: PFOR, NU, PN, (SOMOZA DEBAYLE, ANASTASIO), (TORRIJOS, OMAR)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006